

## Week 9 - Theoretical Synthesis

Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, "Human Rights Advocacy Networks in Latin America," in Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, pp. 79-120.

Keck and Sikkink ("K&S") examine the role of the transnational human rights advocacy network in the emergence of international human rights norms, and compare the effectiveness of the networks in Argentina and Mexico in the 1970s and 1980s.

Before WWII, few policymakers and intellectuals paid attention to human rights per se. The Wells campaign (reintroducing the idea of an international bill of rights) and Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech led to the conception of international protection of human rights as a pillar of the post-War order. U.S. fear of repeating the failure to ratify the Versailles Treaty resulted in substantial congressional and nongovernmental representation in San Francisco in 1945. Latin American delegations supported the human rights cause at the San Francisco conference, and while the U.N. Charter at the time promoted human rights on a hortatory level, at this stage the U.N. seriously lacked assurance and enforcement powers. The first human rights treaty adopted by the U.N., the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), was arguably facilitated in large part by individual efforts of Raphael Lemkin, who introduced the word "genocide" to describe Nazi crimes. The U.S. failed to ratify the Genocide Treaty, in large part because of the subordination of human rights norms to anticommunism. With détente in the early 1970s and the Chilean coup of 1973, the human rights network first truly emerged, with many efforts being spearheaded by Amnesty International (AI).

In the 1970s and 1980s, human rights NGOs proliferated and political entrepreneurs, such as Pepe Zalaquette and Joe Eldrige, played large roles in making human rights prominent as international issues. Domestic NGOs primarily focused on violations in their home countries, but many activists became involved in transnational networks as a result of their personal experiences. One issue these domestic NGOs faced is capturing political space in a network that many activists with leftist solidarity backgrounds considered apolitical. International organizations at this time also developed several groups that explicitly addressed human rights, with INGOs often playing consultative roles. Private foundations and founders (most importantly the Ford Foundation) also played a large part in the emergence of the network, providing financing for organizations that supported their ideas. Grants in international human rights works grew at an increasing pace after 1977, starting with research grants for academics and later moving towards more activist projects aimed at institution-building.

K&S make the broad claim that "[m]ost governments' human rights policies have emerged as a response to pressure from organizations in the human rights network, and have depended fundamentally on network information" (p. 102). Yet K&S also concede that it is precisely for this reason that attributing an independent effect to network pressures remains difficult. K&S examine the cases of Argentina and Mexico to test this hypothesis.

In Argentina, K&S argue that the military's decision to make political opponents "disappear" was influenced by the international human rights network even before the military coup of 1976. Fearing the international reaction to the Chilean coup, the military refused to acknowledge the disappearance of its victims. The publication of the AI report, denouncing the Argentine regime, however, prompted reactions by foreign governments, who relied heavily at the outset on information provided by NGOs. Once the Argentine government recognized the necessity to improve its international image to restore flows of military and economic aid, the

human rights situation improved significantly (as measured by the number of "disappeared"). The Argentine case highlights the fact the "international pressures did not work independently, but rather in coordination with national actors" (p. 107). In 1985, after democratization, top military leaders of the juntas were tried and convicted for human rights abuses, aided in large part by "human rights forensic science" (p. 110).

In Mexico, the human rights abuses, such as the 1968 shooting of student protesters, received little international attention up to the early 1980s because (a) abuses by Mexico's elected civilian government were neglected for more serious abuses in other Latin American countries, (b) Mexico had a relatively progressive stance on human rights, and (c) the absence of Mexican human rights organizations. In the mid-1980s this situation began to change, as more Mexican human rights NGOs were established, such as the Mexican Academy for Human Rights. International human rights NGOs also refocused their attention as human rights improved in other Latin American countries, publishing several reports on Mexico. The splitting of Mexico's ruling party into the PRD and PRI, as well as free trade agreement negotiations with the U.S. and Canada, made Mexico's government more sensitive to charges of human rights violations. The Americas Watch report led to the first U.S. Congressional hearings on human rights in Mexico, as well as rulings by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights recommending electoral reform. This pressure culminated in the creation of the National Commission on Human Rights to modify electoral laws and procedures, which has arguably served as an "effective advocate for human rights" (p. 115). Realizing that it could no longer control information as tightly as in 1968, the Mexican government acted with greater restraint during the 1994 Chiapas uprising.

K&S conclude that "international human rights pressures can lead to changes in human rights practices, helping to transform understandings about the nature of a state's sovereign authority over its citizens" (p. 116). They also outline other potential conditions for the effectiveness of the international human rights network. First, the existence of domestic NGOs may be necessary to provide information to international NGOs. Second, the network may have to make a decision to focus on abuses in a particular country. Third, target vulnerability may be heavily affected by leverage from trade, military or other economic issues. Fourth, internalization of human right norms leaders (e.g., compatibility with conceptions of national identity or identity of elites) will facilitate a transformation of state practices.

Lastly, K&S argue that both realists and liberals cannot account for the adoption and implementation of human rights practices and the role of the transnational advocacy networks since norms and ideas are central to change and cooperation in the human rights sphere.